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Hope, Fear and Planning

Even by the outbreak of World War II (WWII), the Georges River was still seen as a place for picnics as well as a place with many ‘wasted’ spaces. But WWII changed the way Sydney saw its Georges River. Although the end of the war was celebrated, the changes it had brought had already sounded the death knell of the Picnic River.

With the country at war, its empty spaces offered more land for military training and internment camps, and once the Americans were forced to retreat from the Pacific, there was room for them too. The war had come very close after the rapid advance of the Japanese across South-East Asia and the Pacific, the bombing of Darwin in February 1942 and the intrusion into Sydney Harbour by Japanese submarines just months later in May. This made all the coastal rivers seem vulnerable. East Hills people remember the army coming down the river and ordering all the boats – no matter how small or old – to be ‘smashed up’ to stop them being used by any future invaders.¹ In this nervous atmosphere, the Americans were welcomed and the Georges River became one of a series of key locations for US Defense installations.

There had already been much disturbance along the Georges River as discussed in the last chapter. Salt Pan Creek was an example, including the swampy land at Herne Bay, on the eastern shore. During the 1930s, the landowning Levingston family had cleared much timber and filled in the swampland to build a golf course.

1 Colin Jacobsen, interview, 12 July 2006.



Figure 3.1: Levingston family golf course, undated c. 1940.

Constructed during the 1930s at Herne Bay by reclaiming swampland and clearing much timber. This photograph looks across the golf course to Salt Pan Creek. Negative number 100869. Courtesy of *Pictorial Canterbury*, Canterbury-Bankstown City Council, Local History Photograph Collection.



Figure 3.2: Herne Bay Military Hospital, 1944.

Aerial view looking west, towards Salt Pan Creek, of the massive US Army Hospital built over the Levingston Golf Course at Herne Bay, opened in 1943. This photograph shows the rail line across Salt Pan Creek at the left of the photo. The image also shows the large area of open waters of the creek at the rail bridge relatively free of mangroves in 1944. Source: Canterbury and District Historical Society, photograph, 'I Grew Up in Mortdale', Facebook, accessed 5 May 2020, @igrewupinmortdale2223.

This simply looked like empty space when wartime military needs prevailed, so the Livingston Golf Course at Herne Bay was turned into a huge US Army hospital.

Postwar Planning: The County of Cumberland Plan

As the tide of the war turned and it appeared victory would be possible, governments in Australia began planning for a future peace. The Australian Government had come to the conclusion that reconstruction after the war must achieve greater industrial independence so that the country would not risk being cut off from vital supply chains as had occurred during the war. Increasing secondary manufacturing was a priority and, for this, space was going to be required.² Yet, for the State of New South Wales, there was an even more urgent priority: the housing shortage. This had been brewing in Sydney from the 1920s but the Depression and then the war had delayed any hope of providing enough homes for the city's growing population. In this period, the profession of urban planning was rising and it was seen as an important vehicle for delivering both goals in the same process.

This led to the plan for the whole of Sydney, which technically was located in the little-used administrative area known as the County of Cumberland. The planning, begun in 1949, was therefore known as the County of Cumberland Plan (CCP) and was released to the public in 1951. Its goals were to be largely fulfilled through regulation by creating 'zones' for particular types of development. Its other regulatory tools were to be 'suburban employment zones, open space acquisitions and the Green Belt', the latter being a strategy for containing urban sprawl by reserving areas through zoning as either 'rural' or 'green space', ensuring that this land would remain undeveloped and, in the case of 'green space', as publicly accessible parks, incorporating bushland for unstructured recreation.³ While there was no consideration given to conservation of the 'bush', there was an expectation that natural, native bush would remain. All this planning instrument related to land-based locations – there was no regulation over use of the underwater land like the beds of rivers. Denis Winston called it 'Sydney's Great Experiment' in his 1957 study, regarded as the classic exposition of the plan's goals.⁴

2 Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment*.

3 Ashton and Freestone, *Town Planning*.

4 Winston, *Sydney's Great Experiment*.

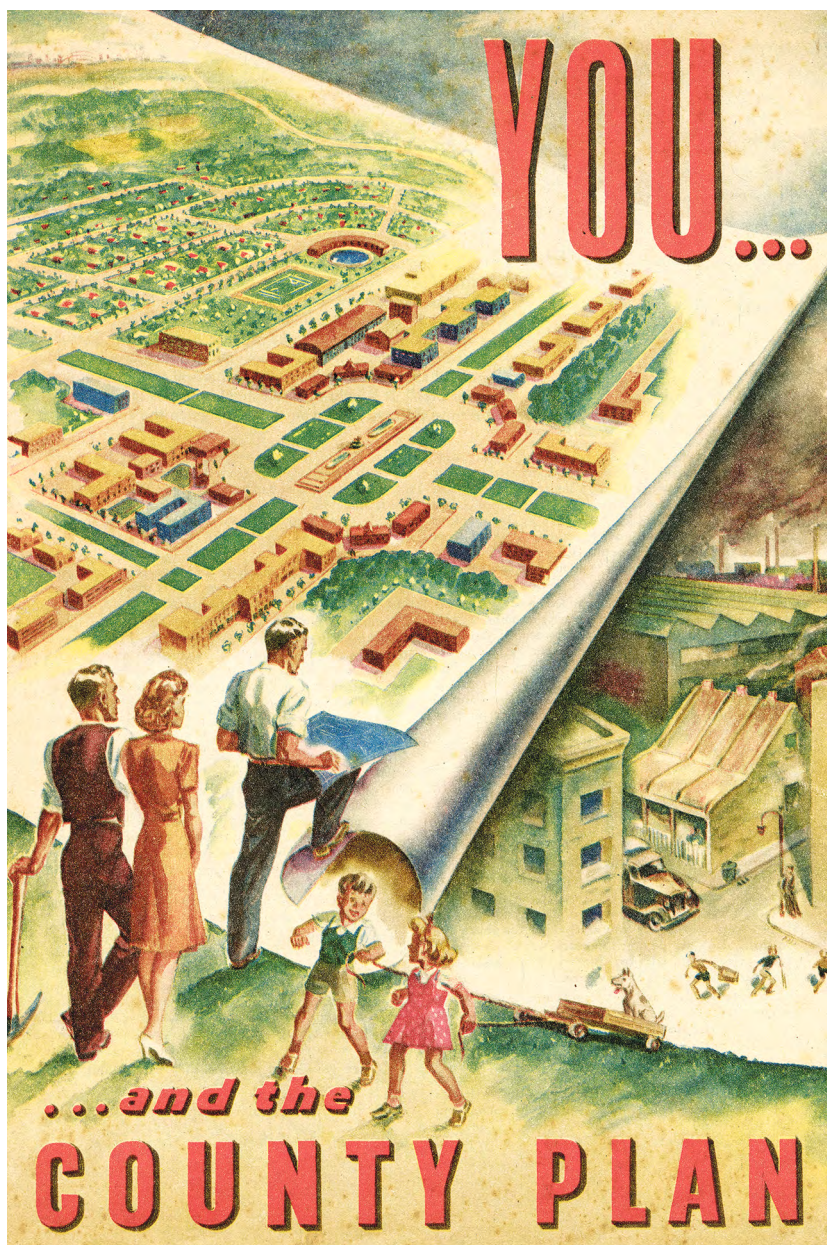
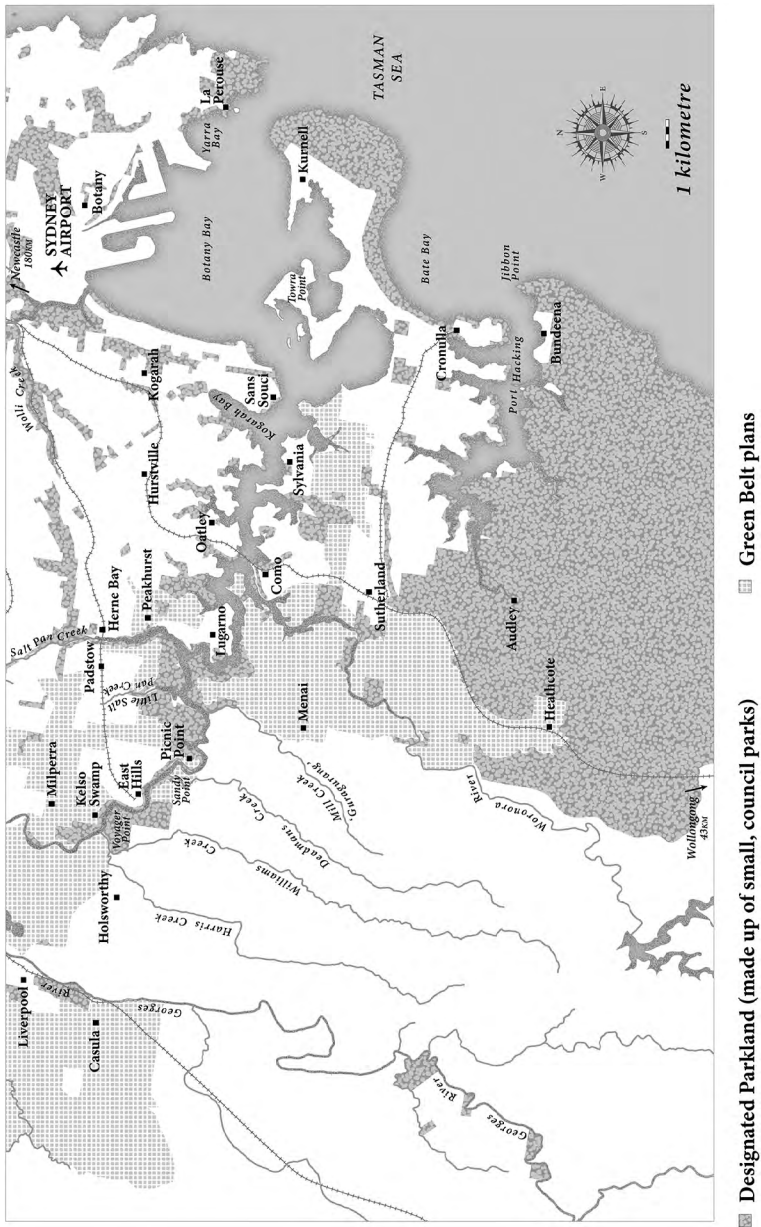


Figure 3.3: 1945 poster for the coming County of Cumberland Plan, showing the inner city as crowded and polluted – and dangerous.

The plan is shown to be ushering a suburban future for the (nuclear) family that is ordered and neat, as are the green spaces shown. No wild bushland there! *You and the County Plan* (ref 2020/503368) reproduced courtesy of City of Sydney Archives.



Map 3.1: County of Cumberland Plan section showing proposed green belt from Royal National Park to Georges River.

The area proposed by the Cumberland County Plan to be retained as ‘green belt’, published with the plan in 1951. This map fuelled the hopes of residents of the Georges River that the bushland along their river would be recognised and protected. Most of the areas shown as green belt on this map were later subdivided and developed as residential suburbs. Cartography: Sharon Harrup.

The CCP offered an exciting possibility for those Georges River residents who loved the wildness of the riverbanks and wanted to see their river recognised as valued and iconic ‘bush’ in the way the 1879 national park at Sutherland had been recognised. The map of the CCP showed the proposed green space to stretch all the way from the Sutherland national park up to the Georges River itself. This was the hope that the CCP offered: that the Georges River would finally be recognised as truly Australian bushland, to be valued and celebrated forever.

Yet this hope was futile. The plan was unsuccessful in its attempt to conserve what is now highly valued green space in order to consolidate the city’s unchecked expansion. The assumption is that it was defeated by rapacious land developers and local government councils hungry for rates.⁵ However, opposition to the green belt was not just from developers. Despite their hopes, some local residents had deeply mixed feelings about the plan. While many local communities wanted more open space, the CCP raised lasting anxieties among the general population because, although it aimed to conserve ‘green space’, it expected to do this through the contradictory process of allowing increased density of population within the areas zoned ‘residential’. While still expecting freestanding homes to be widespread, the CCP endorsed increases in low blocks of flats and multiple tenancies in those inner suburbs, as well as supporting the goals of the newly established state Housing Commission, which sought to solve crowding and disrepair in inner-city housing by moving people to the suburbs, initially into hostels and later into newly built homes.⁶ This contradiction left many in the Georges River area uneasy, fearing that they were about to lose the spaciousness that they so valued.

The oral histories of Georges River residents confirm that there were different strands in local ambivalence to the plan. As the CCP showed, green belt reservations from sale were planned for much of the shoreline of the Georges River, with additional restrictions for agricultural reservations (zoned ‘rural’) in Lugarno and on the western shore of Little Salt Pan Creek. These reservations were opposed by land developers, who had lost money in the 1920s after the rumours of railway development failed to materialise. They still had many unsold subdivisions and so were eager

5 Allport, ‘The Unrealized Promise’; Ashton and Freestone, *Town Planning*.

6 Spearritt, *Sydney since the Twenties*; Spearritt, *Sydney’s Century*; Allport, ‘The Unrealized Promise’; Ashton and Freestone, *Town Planning*.

to expand housing areas, not have them further restricted by a green belt. Similarly, some individual landowners, like commercial speculators, were hoping to subdivide and sell their farming land, so for them, the green belt and agricultural zoning presented unwanted restrictions.

Yet many local residents nurtured the hope offered by the CCP that the bush – and particularly the river foreshores – would be protected as green zone for picnics, hunting or other, less legal, pleasures. The Picnic Point Regatta Association and the residents of East Hills, for example, feared that the increasing density of the residential areas would spill over into the open space, leading to more and more private development of the river foreshore. Their concern was that the green zone plan could not be implemented, leaving their highly valued open space vulnerable to development.

The Postwar Population Explosion

Despite the best efforts of those who developed the CCP, it had assumed that orderly expansion and the retention of green space could occur without any effective mechanisms to deliver them. In fact, the rise in population far outstripped the 1949 planners' expectations.

By 1954 the increase in Sydney's population was already double what had been predicted in 1948.⁷ From 1946 to 1961, it was the adjacent Bankstown and Fairfield local government areas, already densely settled, that faced the greatest absolute increase in population across the whole of Sydney, from a base of 69,599 to 232,958 people, a rise of over 160,000 people or 240 per cent. The population of Sutherland, with a much larger area on the southern side of the river, also rose steeply, adding 82,562 people to rise by 282 per cent, although with less densely packed results. While some outlying areas like Blacktown and Hornsby had a comparable proportionate increase, their initial population was far smaller so their absolute numbers remained lower. It was only the three Georges River districts that faced such a massive rise in real numbers.⁸ All these people

7 Spearritt, *Sydney since the Twenties*, 93, citing 1954 Census; Kass, 'Cheaper than Rent'.

8 Allport, 'Castles of Security', 103.

needed housing, for which timber, fibro (often asbestos fibro), tiles and cement were required. Riverbeds were a source of sand for cement and were close at hand to where the greatest need was being felt.⁹

Zoning and Factories

But a major weakness in the CCP was the existing lack of land zoned 'residential only' in the working-class south-west. Decisions for 'residential only' zones had to be ratified at state government level and any new large factory developments could only be located in areas that were not zoned 'residential only'. During the interwar years, the vast majority of the 'residential only' zones approved had been those in high land-value areas like the North Shore and the Eastern Suburbs, from where wealthier and higher status interest groups could exert more pressure. Proposals for 'residential only' zones for low land-value areas like the Cooks and Georges rivers areas were more usually rejected.¹⁰

A zoning of 'industrial' was more readily approved by the state parliament after WWII for the Georges River, as Arthur Gietzelt, then president of Sutherland Shire, recorded in his autobiography. Gietzelt described a strategy of increasing open space for recreation in 1962 by gaining a zoning of 'industrial' over a large area, some of which could then be sold to industry while the rest was used for public open space.¹¹ Such strategies resulted in the concentration of new factories in the council areas along the Georges River. From 1945 to 1965, the proportion of all factories located in the inner city declined from over 68 per cent to 32 per cent, while those in the 'South' region – predominantly Bankstown – increased from 9 per cent to 20 per cent, an increase greater than in any

9 According to the geological history of the coast at Botany Bay, the earth's crust there has risen in the past, so that the lowest points in the Georges River are around Liverpool, where much of the river's burden of silt was therefore dropped, until, over millions of years, the river could cut its way through the Woronora Plateau to the sea. While this left lower reaches with sandy beds, more suited to building materials, there were also higher concentrations of acid sulphate soils in the riverbed as a result of bacterial and chemical interactions around past and present riverine vegetation. The riverbed materials below Liverpool, therefore, seemed more suited to building, but carried substantial risks to environmental health, to be discovered later. Haworth, Baker and Flood, 'Predicted and Observed Holocene Sea-Levels'; Haworth, Baker and Flood, 'A 6000-Year-Old Fossil Dugong'; Baker, Haworth and Flood, 'An Oscillating Holocene Sea-Level'; Baker, Haworth and Flood, 'Inter-Tidal Fixed Indicators'.

10 Coward, *Out of Sight*, 240–42; Butlin, *Sydney's Environmental Amenities*, 133.

11 Gietzelt, *Sticks and Stones*, 189–92.

other area. This led to major industrial pollution of the air and soil, as well as of the river waters themselves, leading to severe health hazards for local residents.¹²

The high number of factories in the area led the government to locate most of its new migrant worker hostels and low-income, city-relocation hostels in this area to provide workers for the factories. The unpredicted increase in the population overall was, therefore, compounded in the Georges River area. This in turn meant that public housing services like curbing, guttering, public transport, parkland and even public schooling all fell far behind the rate at which people were dumped onto the hostels and estates along the river. Sewerage infrastructure was already far behind demand in the 1920s.¹³ As the postwar population soared, the government's main anxiety was about safe drinking water, particularly after a prolonged drought from 1936 to 1942. So, government spending was focused on providing adequate piped drinking water into the thousands of new houses. Capital works of the Water Board prioritised water storage and dam building, which was continuous from 1918 to 1960. There was far less focus on the disposal of liquid wastes and virtually none at all on sewerage infrastructure, leaving most of the new estates unsewered for many years after their development.¹⁴

Although plans had been well advanced in 1911 to provide sewerage across the city, World War I (WWI), the Depression and then war again had blocked any progress at all. This meant that repairs and maintenance fell behind, and people in areas already sewered had many complaints. Things were much worse along the Georges River, as it was already under pressure from its major disproportionate population increase and lag in house construction. This led to sewerage infrastructure, particularly in the least affluent and, therefore, less politically influential areas, falling ever further behind the expansion of population and the extent of housing, both private and public.¹⁵ By 1959 Bankstown Municipality had the lowest rate of houses connected to a sewerage system (31 per cent) of any major residential area in Sydney.¹⁶ This major delay led to a long backlog of sewerage networking, which meant that alternatives had to be found,

12 Coward, *Out of Sight*, 233.

13 Spearritt, *Sydney's Century*, 20.

14 Coward, *Out of Sight*, 249; Butlin, *Sydney's Environmental Amenities*, 139.

15 Coward, *Out of Sight*, 248–52.

16 Ibid., 251. Coward drew his figures from the New South Wales Statistical Register, which cited the Metropolitan Water Sewage and Drainage Board, 1960.

such as continued or expanded use of septic tanks. Often, however, the expansion of housing into previously non-residential bushland meant that such temporary septic disposal systems were located in unsuitable soils. This led to frequent overflows and run-off finding their way into rivers. Even more directly, distrust in the known inadequacies of the disposal infrastructure led to raw or minimally treated sewage being dumped straight into rivers.¹⁷

Bankstown Council pleaded with the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board for an extension to enable flush toilets to be used at Bankstown School, achieved in 1951, but, as W. V. Aird's 1961 study of sewerage infrastructure in Sydney shows, the rest of the areas to the west of Salt Pan Creek – and much of that to its east – could not be served with flush toilet infrastructure until long after.¹⁸ Aird points to the striking absence of effective waste disposal in any of the areas that drained into the Georges River in 1961. (See Chapters 5 and 6 for the continuing effects of these decisions.) The reason for the failure of the state government to extend sewerage infrastructure to these areas was cost. As Aird explained, it was simply too expensive to consider sewerage infrastructure when the priority had to be to provide potable water to the expanding population. The populations along the Georges River, even when the Labor Party was in power, did not have enough political clout to intervene in the state government's prioritisation of expenditure.

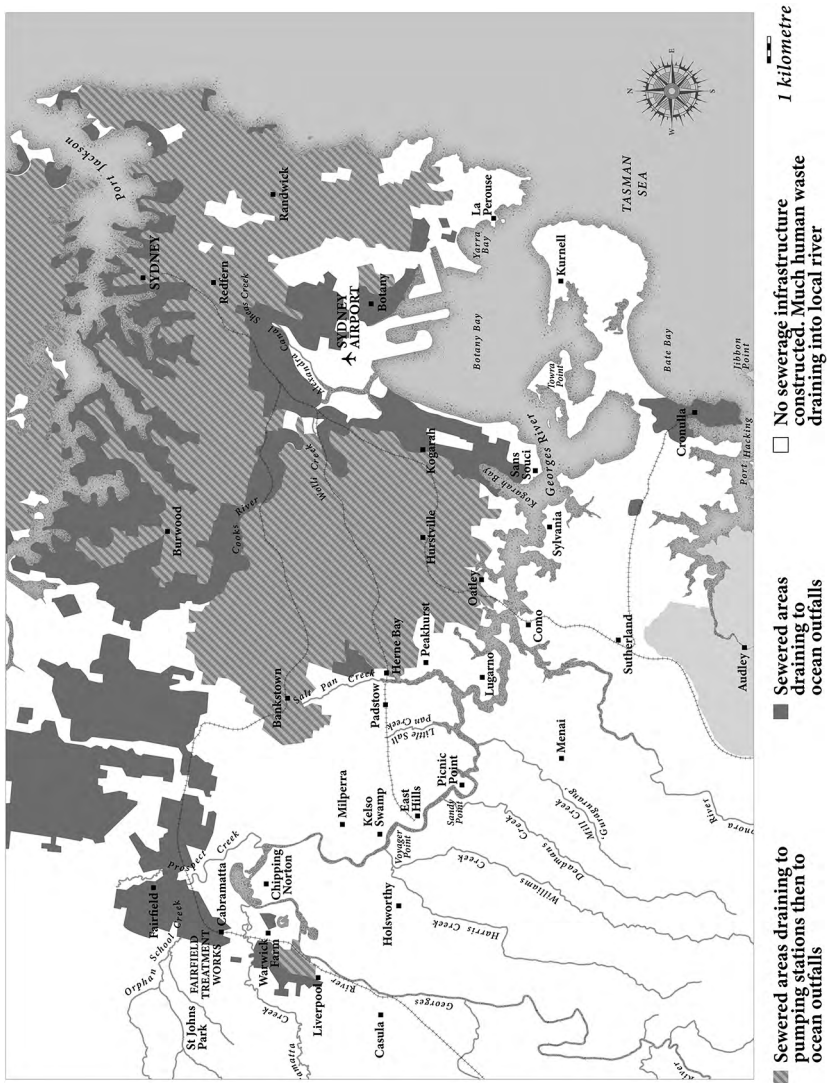
By every measure, the working-class environments of the Georges River area came off worst – although sometimes jockeying with the Cooks River, infamous for its fumes, pollution and heavy metal contamination, for the wooden spoon.¹⁹ There were more factories and so more unregulated industrial pollution. And there were more and more incoming people and so there was more pressure to build houses on scarce land. This meant there was even less sewerage infrastructure being built than anywhere else in the city and so the area had the worst run-off into the river. Put simply, the heaviest environmental cost of Sydney's postwar modernisation was paid by the Georges River.²⁰

17 Ibid.

18 Aird, *The Water Supply*, 'Twenty-Year-Long Struggle Brings Sewerage at Last to Bankstown School', *Tribune*, 24 October 1951, 4.

19 Tyrrell, *River Dreams*.

20 Butlin, *Sydney's Environmental Amenity*, Ch. 3.



Map 3.2: Sewerage infrastructure, southern Sydney, 1961.

W. V. Aird's history, *The Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage of Sydney*, showed that, in 1961, a very large proportion of Sydney's population – all those living in the unshaded area on this map – had no sewerage infrastructure at all, other than septic tanks, the overloaded treatment works at Fairfield and a few smaller treatment ponds. Across this unshaded area, most human waste, septic tank overflow and stormwater run-off flowed directly or indirectly into the Georges River. Cartography: Sharon Harrup.

Hostels, Slums and Subdivisions – Shifting Sands?

Although various housing settlements and plans had been attempted before WWI, there had been little general success and no appetite for public housing schemes, even in the Depression. The New South Wales Housing Commission was established in 1941 by the McKell government to respond to the continuing severe shortage of housing. Later, with demobilisation and the hopes many young couples had for beginning families, the need for housing became acute, leading the federal government to become involved in what became social housing.²¹ Added to these sources of population increase, there were Aboriginal families from rural New South Wales who refused to continue to put up with the discrimination they faced in country towns. The trappings of modernity such as indoor picture shows and Olympic pools had increased the opportunities for segregation and many Aboriginal families decided that, with work more prevalent in the cities, they could get better schooling and health care if they moved. These rural families therefore moved into Redfern, often sharing accommodation, such as the Smiths from Wellington who lived with relations in overcrowded Caroline Street, hoping to move eventually into a home of their own.²²

Despite the fears of Georges River residents and the hopes of land developers that land sales to private owners would increase rapidly, it was in fact the New South Wales Housing Commission's social housing program that first impacted the river population and environments.²³ The federal and state governments, eager to respond rapidly to the housing crisis, turned first to the most readily available and cheapest sources of land and accommodation. These were offered by the military establishments dotted all over the city, many of which, as discussed earlier, were located along the Georges River in areas dismissed in previous decades as 'wastelands'.

While the federal government was interested in hostels for assisted migrants and displaced people, the state government's Housing Commission focused on inner-city crowding and postwar needs. In the midst of a rash of headlines about poor quality housing and 'slum conditions' in the inner

21 Allport, 'Castles of Security'; Spearritt, *Sydney's Century*, 19–21.

22 Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*.

23 Davies, Mulholland and Pipe, *West of the River Road*, 49.

city, the state government's Housing Commission planned to offer needy families temporary accommodation in hostels prior to moving them to the houses that the commission would build in the future. To make this proposition attractive to people who might otherwise have chosen to stay close to family and work, even in crowded conditions, the rental of hostel flats was very low and they were available immediately.

The first and largest hostels were set up at Herne Bay, close to Salt Pan Creek, and at Hargrave Park, near Liverpool, not far from Chipping Norton. There were a number of other hostels set up soon after, with only a very few on the more northerly side of the city, where the largest was Bradfield Park.²⁴ This hostel was closer to 'white-collar' job opportunities and Spearritt has argued that it was 'the main centre for white-collar workers, an appropriate setting given its location in middle-class Ku-ring-gai'.²⁵ Most hostel residents were brought to facilities in working-class areas.

The Herne Bay hostel was housed in the sprawling US Army Hospital and, by 1954, it could house 6,000 people. They lived in weatherboard barracks, each building divided into three, with no soundproofing between families.²⁶ They did at least have kitchens inside each family's flat, allowing people to cook for themselves, although residents often had to share bathing facilities as well as laundries.²⁷

The mainstream press commentary was overwhelmingly negative. Hogan cites the response from the *Truth* in 1956 to the Commonwealth's introduction of the Colombo Plan, which was to bring students to Australia for higher education in an attempt to distract attention from the country's 'White Australia' immigration restrictions. The *Truth* argued that Australia had its own Third World, and asked the foreign minister in banner headlines: 'What about the horror of Herne Bay, Mr Casey?'²⁸ For the earlier Georges River residents, the rapidly expanding hostels added to the sense that spaces were closing down.

24 Hogan, 'Postwar Emergency Housing in Sydney'.

25 Spearritt, *Sydney since the Twenties*, 101.

26 Interviews conducted among Aboriginal residents for this research included Judy Chester, Janny Ely and John Lennis. Other Aboriginal families there included John Kinsela's family, the Madderns and Captain Reg Saunders, whose family was the second to live at Herne Bay. See Glenda Humes's account in Sykes and Edwards, *Murawina*.

27 Hogan, 'Postwar Emergency Housing in Sydney', 12–15; Hogan, *Almost Like Home*; Madden, *Hernia Bay*.

28 Cited in Hogan 'Postwar Emergency Housing in Sydney', 18, from *Truth*, 10 June 1956, 3.



Figure 3.4: Clothes lines at rear of flats, Herne Bay hostel, June 1946.

The long weatherboard and fibro wards of the US Army Hospital were converted in 1945 into the Herne Bay hostel for families from the inner city by the New South Wales Housing Department. Each long hut was partitioned to allow self-contained living units for three families, each with cooking facilities, but with shared bathrooms and toilets. This photograph shows the rear of a hut at the Herne Bay hostel, with clothes lines and fences dividing family living spaces. Photograph reference number: 129560—1. Reproduced courtesy of Australian War Memorial.



Figure 3.5: ‘Wet Day at the Herne Bay Hostel’, 1950.

Published originally in *Sun Herald*. Courtesy of Nine Publishing.



Figure 3.6: Herne Bay hostel nursery school, 1947.

Sydney Day Nursery was called on to set up a day care centre as soon as possible. This was built in 1946 and opened in January 1947. The Herne Bay hostel brought the first postwar influx of population into the areas surrounding the Georges River. This was closely followed by further independent building, as young owner-builders – both returned servicemen and others from the inner city – expanded the suburbs around the railway lines. Then still more hostel accommodation was needed for the many assisted immigrants, often brought to be workers in the river's new industrial areas. The rapid rise in population included many children born in the 1940s and 1950s, later known as 'baby boomers'. Courtesy of Archive of Sydney Day Nursery Children's Services.

Factories and Workers: 'Poms' and 'Reffos'

The fears of local residents about the weakness of the CCP's zoning recommendations were well founded. A far more dangerous threat than any council and local developer pressure was the desire by industries to expand their factories or open new ones. Not only had the federal government decided that it would support industrial expansion, but state governments were eager to increase employment possibilities. State governments were, at the same time, reluctant to locate industrial development in politically powerful, middle-class areas. Noel Butlin's study of the Botany Bay area pointed to the tendency in New South Wales Government decisions to reject applications for 'residential only' zoning from councils in working-class areas and, particularly, from those along the Georges River where population was relatively sparse. Dan Coward's

intensive analysis of state government decisions confirmed this pattern, demonstrating that far more 'residential only' zonings were approved for high land-value areas than in low land-value areas.²⁹

In the postwar period, the emerging economy of consumption, particularly of white goods, required very different types of land use than the heavier industries like steelmaking, which had characterised pre-war factories. Instead, after WWII, industries needed flat land in large amounts to develop 'assembly line' factories, in which 'process workers' assembled the many new electrical goods that were finding places in homes and businesses.³⁰ Such large areas of flat land were exactly what the Georges River wastelands offered.

These factories required workers and the 'wasteland' areas along the Georges River that were not filled up with industrial sites seemed very available for workers homes. So, added to the already-increasing population of owner-builders taking up subdivisions and the role of the Housing Commission in bringing inner-city residents out to hostels and then to newly built houses, the federal government escalated its assisted migration policies. Some 'displaced people' were included in the migrant intake, dislocated by WWII and the subsequent imposition of Cold War polarisation in Eastern Europe. The majority, however, were intended to be from the UK, where Australia was advertised as offering attractive climates, abundant jobs and ready homes. In fact, these assisted migrants were located in a series of barrack-like hostels revealingly called 'migrant *worker* hostels' – most located on military land, as it was again the least expensive option. Some were carved out of the Housing Commission hostel areas like Herne Bay, but others were standalone establishments, like the East Hill migrant workers' hostel at Voyager Point on the southern bank and Villawood near Fairfield on the northern side of the Georges River.

The conditions for migrant workers in these Commonwealth hostels were even worse than for the Housing Commission hostel residents. The Commonwealth government had decided to save funds on its emergency housing by building different facilities for migrants and displaced people, even though many were also housed in former military establishments and alongside the Housing Commission hostels. The migrant workers and displaced people were not only in crowded and poorly soundproofed

29 Butlin, *Sydney's Environmental Amenities*; Coward, *Out of Sight*.

30 Spearritt, *Sydney's Century*, 116; Logan, 'Suburban Manufacturing'.

dwellings but also were forced to eat in canteens, as they were denied private cooking equipment in their flats, and they had to share ablution blocks as well.³¹ This was a far cry from the glowing advertisements that had enticed many families to leave war-damaged Britain to come to Australia, and many protested. For local river residents, often building their own fibro homes at weekends, these assisted migrants soon acquired the label of ‘whingeing Poms’ while the displaced families from Eastern Europe were even more denigrated as ‘reffos’. Many of the British migrants returned to the UK, but for the displaced people there was simply nowhere to which they could return. These years along the river saw not only rising populations and diminishing space, but also rising social tensions and a retreat into ethnocentrism that marked the Georges River suburbs for many years to come.

Bodgies, Widgies and Delinquents: Fears of and for Working-Class Youth

Three elements in the population increase were felt more heavily and more rapidly in the Georges River area than anywhere in Sydney: the expansion of Housing Commission social housing and inner-city slum clearance, along with the housing of assisted migrant workers and displaced refugees. These were all related to the increasing location of industrial sites onto the readily available military or ‘wasteland’ sites on the river. Together, these elements led directly into the first of the recognisable environmental campaigns on the Georges River – the call for a national park – which was driven by anxieties about crowding as well as the fear (well founded or not) of toxic industrial discharges. Further, there was a delayed element of the population increase that had very real environmental implications: as children were born to the new families in the area, it became clear that there would be a rising generation of working-class adolescents in the Georges River area. This caused a great deal of anxiety, as seen in headlines across the 1950s and into the 1960s, which was felt during that first environmental campaign that was conducted largely during the 1950s. This anxiety was to rise even further in prominence as these children grew, becoming a driving element in the second cluster of environmental campaigns from 1965 to 1975. As it is relevant to both, it should be outlined here.

31 Hogan, ‘Postwar Emergency Housing in Sydney’, 12–13.

The influence of American popular media (like film and music) had already been felt – and criticised – during the interwar period. After the stationing of US troops in Australia from 1943, during which social tensions emerged (of the ‘over-paid, over-sexed and over HERE!’ variety), there had emerged deeply ambivalent postwar attitudes across many groups in Australia towards American cultural influences. From both the UK and the US, there were signs of adolescent discontent emerging that fuelled these attitudes.

As the Georges River area – particularly from Liverpool to Bankstown and Peakhurst – had seen such a rise in the number of working-class jobs and families, and, consequently, of adolescents, these fears fell heavily on both elites and on working-class parents in these suburbs. Parents feared for their children’s future in a period when training for apprenticeships and tertiary education was expensive and, for many, simply unattainable. For political and social elites in other parts of Sydney, working-class youth posed a threat – a menace of violence driven by envy – that must be controlled and contained.

Early headlines in Sydney put such fears into very public circulation: ‘Juvenile Delinquency Begins in the Wrong Type of Home’, one headline shouted 1945.³² Parents – and particularly mothers – who went to work in the new factories and were not ‘at home’ were a cause of such threats, while ‘broken homes’ and a rising social tolerance for divorce was another source of parental guilt. In any event, the outcome was the threat of violence for the general public, as this *Sydney Morning Herald* headline made clear: ‘Wolf Packs on the Prowl’.³³ In the Georges River area, this sense of threat was compounded by the xenophobia around incoming assisted migrants and refugees. An article in 1957 in a local Fairfield newspaper explicitly linked allegedly knife-wielding ‘bodgies’ and ‘widgies’ on buses in the area with a ‘New Australian’ who had – in a completely different incident – ‘produced a knife’.³⁴

32 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 1945, cited in Powell, *Out West*, see ‘Menacing Youth’.

33 ‘Wolf Packs on the Prowl’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1955, 29.

34 ‘Bodgies and Widgies in Fairfield’, *Biz*, 27 February 1957, 7.

One of the new suburbs into which the Housing Commission resettled the residents of its hostel at Herne Bay was Green Valley, a housing estate just west of Liverpool. Between 1961 and 1966 its population increased from 1,000 to 24,000 people, and in 1966 around 60 per cent of that population was under 20 years of age. As Gabrielle Gwyther points out:

The mere concentration of such large numbers of youth in the area meant that 'delinquency' was an observable problem and consequently newsworthy. The media unfairly dubbed the suburb 'Dodge City' in reference to the mayhem of the American wild west.³⁵

Gwyther might have added that it was the economic and social class of these concentrated numbers of young people that was of such concern, while the assumption of mayhem on the American frontier was a reflection of much of the popular culture then flowing from the US.³⁶

Such headlines and reporting continued, and many authorities offered 'solutions', most of which, while blaming parents and particularly mothers, proposed outcomes that were spatial. A clear statement of this spatial approach to solving the 'problem' was the 1962 address to Rotary (a charity and social organisation of businesspeople) in nearby Parramatta by Sergeant Con Hansen in an article headlined 'Terrifying Increase in Delinquency'.³⁷ As well as criticising 'films and literature emphasising sex and crime', Hansen identified 'inadequate home life, lack of home training and broken marriages' as the causes of this 'terrifying' increase in the area's crime by juveniles. He proposed four solutions: 1) social resistance to easier divorce laws in order to hold homes together; 2) increased parental interest in both school and organised youth sport; 3) the provision of more playing fields on which to hold such organised sports; and 4) greater support for youth assistance organisations, particularly 'Boy Scout movement, youth and church clubs'.³⁸ It is notable here that Hansen's conception of this social disorder (in common with the views of many other authority figures) was gendered. While young women (as 'widgies') might misbehave, this postwar menace was overwhelmingly seen to be

35 Gwyther, 'Western Sydney'.

36 Ibid.

37 "'Terrifying" Increase in Delinquency', *Cumberland Argus*, 28 March 1962, 3.

38 Ibid.

caused by young working-class males, an interesting shift from earlier decades of the century when it was the menace of young working-class women's sexuality that was identified as a social threat.³⁹

Most notable in Hansen's proposed solutions was the importance of spatial strategies to counter this 'threat' – through the provision of more organised sports (with parental 'interest') that required more playing fields. Fears for their children as well as interests for themselves can be seen in the motivations of the campaigners who advocated for a 'national park' at East Hills (1947–61). However, by the mid-1960s, when 'top-down' council actions precipitated a series of environmental campaigns (1965–75), it was fears *of* young working-class men held by councillors that dominated. The goal continued to be to use spatial strategies to address social conflicts.

39 Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home'.

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